

ARI Research Note 2009-01

**The Impact of Extending the Special Forces Warrant
Officer Service Obligation on the Recruitment and
Accessioning of Special Forces Warrant Officers**

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January 2009

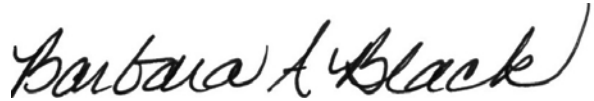
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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE					
1. REPORT DATE (dd-mm-yy) January 2009		2. REPORT TYPE Final		3. DATES COVERED (from. . . to) August 2007 to September 2007	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE The Impact of Extending the Special Forces Warrant Officer Service Obligation on the Recruitment and Accessioning of Special Forces Warrant Officers				5a. CONTRACT OR GRANT NUMBER	
				5b. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER 633007	
6. AUTHOR(S) Robert Kilcullen and James Lussier (USARI)				5c. PROJECT NUMBER A792	
				5d. TASK NUMBER 293	
				5e. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences HQ USASOC ATTN: AOPS/Dr. James Lussier Bldg D2004 Marion Street Fort Bragg, NC 28310				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences 2511 Jefferson Davis Highway Arlington, VA 22202-3926				10. MONITOR ACRONYM ARI	
				11. MONITOR REPORT NUMBER Research Note 2009-01	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited.					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES Subject Matter POC: Robert Kilcullen					
14. ABSTRACT (<i>Maximum 200 words</i>): This research assesses the potential impact of increasing the U.S. Army Special Forces (SF) Warrant Officer (WO) service obligation from six to 10 years on SF Non-commissioned Officer (NCO) interest in applying to become SF WOs. A survey was administered to 293 SF NCOs to assess their attitudes toward applying to become a WO under the current system and under a system in which the WO service requirement was increased from six to 10 years. A separate survey was completed by 98 SF WOs to provide information on how a longer WO service requirement would have affected their decision to apply. An analysis of both surveys suggests that increasing the WO obligation from six to 10 years will result in fewer WO applications. A rough estimate is that the number of applications will drop by 50% if the 10 year obligation is introduced without compensatory incentives. The right package of incentives along with an extended obligation may result in roughly a 25% drop in applications. The incentive package should include financial incentives and options for longer service on Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA) to be maximally effective. The WO recruiting efforts can be maximized by focusing on sergeant first class (SFC) and those with 11-15 Years of Service (YOS), excluding 18Es. Follow-up surveys and/or focus groups can be conducted to better specify the precise level of financial and other incentives necessary to achieve the desired impact.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
Special Forces		Warrant Officers		Extending Service Obligations	
				Accessions	
		19. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT		20. NUMBER OF PAGES	
16. REPORT Unclassified	17. ABSTRACT Unclassified	18. THIS PAGE Unclassified	Unlimited	21. REHPONSIBLE PERSON Diane Hadjosif Publications Specialist (703) 602-8047	

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**Army Project Number
633007.A792**

**Personnel Performance
and Training**

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THE IMPACT OF EXTENDING THE SPECIAL FORCES WARRANT OFFICER SERVICE OBLIGATION ON THE RECRUITMENT AND ACCESSIONING OF SPECIAL FORCES WARRANT OFFICERS

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Overview

This research assesses the potential impact of increasing the U.S. Army Special Forces (SF) Warrant Officer (WO) service obligation from six to 10 years on SF Non-commissioned Officer (NCO) interest in applying to become SF WOs.

A survey was administered to 293 SF NCOs to assess their attitudes toward applying to become a WO under the current system and under a system in which the WO service requirement was increased from six to 10 years. A separate survey was completed by 98 SF WOs to provide information on how a longer WO service requirement would have affected their decision to apply.

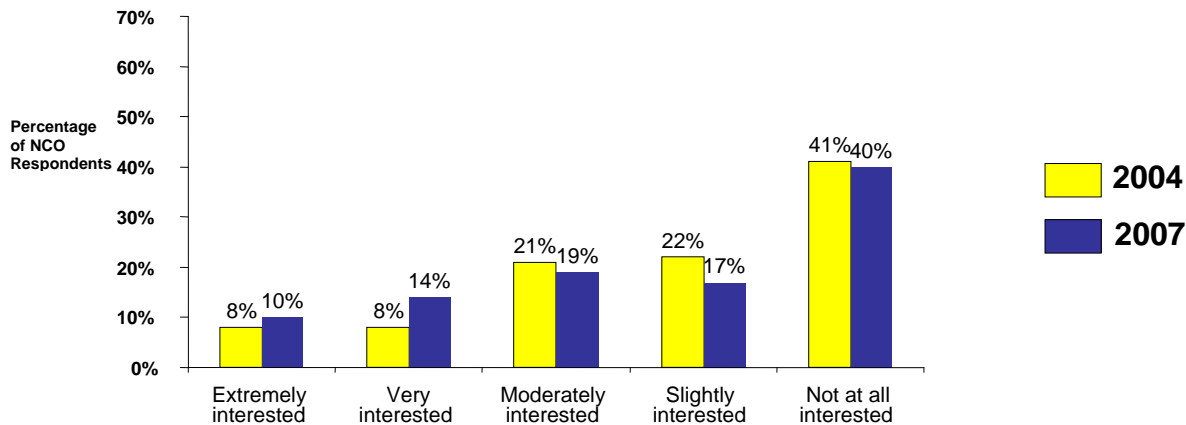


Figure 1. Interest in Becoming a SF WO.

Figure 1 shows that the percentage of SF NCOs who are very or extremely interested in becoming SF WOs increased from 16% to 24% between 2004 and 2007. However, the majority of NCOs in both years shows slight or no interest in becoming a SF WO.

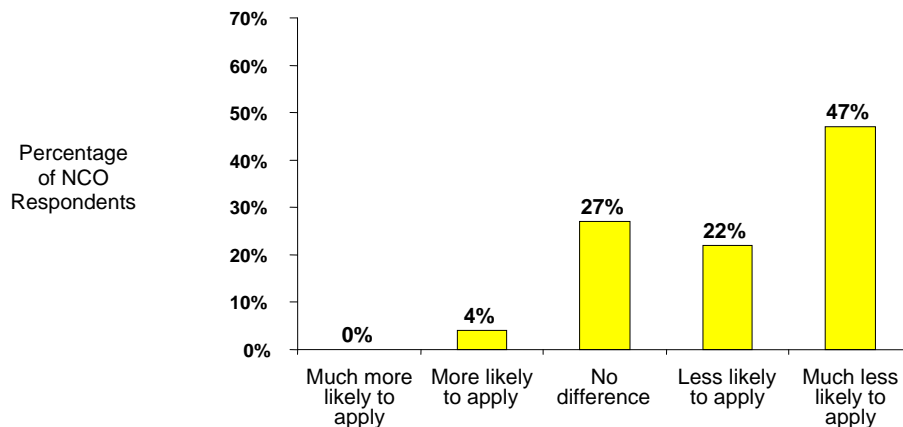


Figure 2. Impact of Longer Obligation on NCOs Interested and Eligible to Apply.

Figure 2 indicates that 69% of NCOs eligible and interested in applying will be less or much less likely to apply under an increased service obligation. Results from the WO survey indicate that nearly 60% would not have applied if a 10 year obligation had been in place. A

rough estimate is that the number of applications will drop by 50% if the 10 year obligation is introduced without compensatory incentives.

Background

Non-commissioned Officers (NCOs) serving in the U.S. Army Special Forces (SF) sometimes do not apply to become SF Warrant Officers (WOs) in sufficient numbers to meet WO force requirements. In the past, SF NCOs transitioning into WO positions faced a pay cut, and this was viewed as the major reason for the low number of SF WO applications. Pay reform was enacted to address the problem in 2004, but subsequent survey research conducted in 2004 by Ferro, Wisecarver, White, and McPherson (2006) revealed that *perceptions* of lower pay for WO positions were still widespread among SF NCOs, and that the perception was an important factor in the desire *not* to apply. Also contributing to the low number of applications is the fact that very few SF NCOs – between 2% and 6% – meet all of the prerequisites for applying to become WOs (Ferro et al., 2006).

The purpose of the current research was to assess the potential impact that increasing the SF WO service obligation from six to 10 years would have on interest in applying.

Procedure

A survey was developed and administered to 293 SF NCOs to gather information on SF NCO attitudes toward applying to become a WO under the current system and under a system in which the WO service requirement was increased from six to 10 years.

A separate survey was created and completed by 98 SF WOs to provide information on how a longer WO service requirement would have affected their decision to apply for a WO position.

The web-based surveys were administered between 27 August and 21 September 2007. The SF NCOs and WOs were notified of the surveys through their chain of command, and were encouraged to take the survey appropriate for their rank. Every respondent answered all of the survey questions, and no data were discarded from the analyses.

Findings

The SF NCOs continue to show only lukewarm interest in applying to become a SF WO (See Figure 1 and Figure 3). Only 24% of those surveyed indicated that they are very/extremely interested in becoming a WO, while more than double – 57% - indicated either slight or no interest in applying.

On the other hand, a comparison of the results with those of Ferro et al. (2006) indicates a slight positive trend in the findings from 2004 to the present. Over that time period, the percentage of NCOs indicating slight or no interest declined by 6% and the percentage of NCOs indicating that they are very/extremely interested in applying rose by 8% (see Figure 1). It could

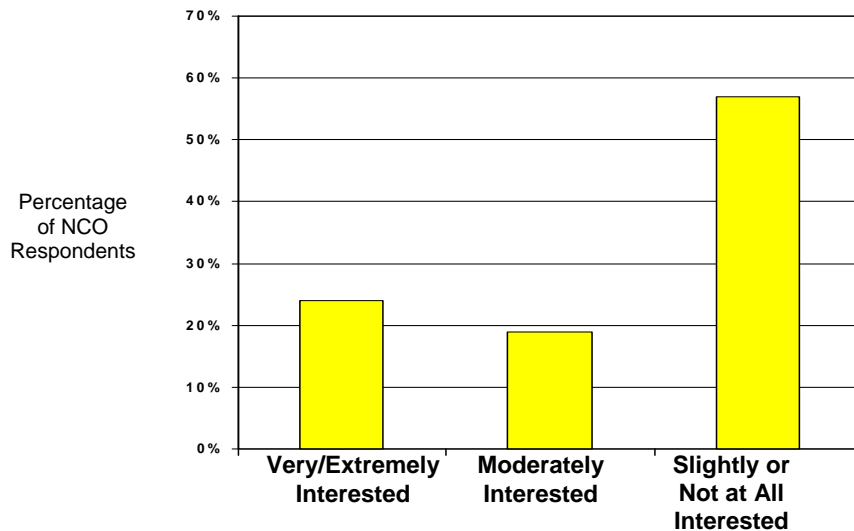


Figure 3. Current Interest in Becoming a SF WO.

be the case that the pay remedy instituted in 2004 is gradually altering perceptions of the financial costs associated with WO positions. Another change since 2004 that might positively affect interest in becoming a WO is that the U.S. Army JFK Special Warfare Center and School has developed its own WO course – the Warrant Officer Technical and Tactical Certification Course (WOTTC) given at Fort Bragg. The WOTTC course is designed specifically for SF candidates and replaces the Warrant Officer Candidate School at Fort Rucker. Special Forces WO candidates began attending the WOTTC in 2006.

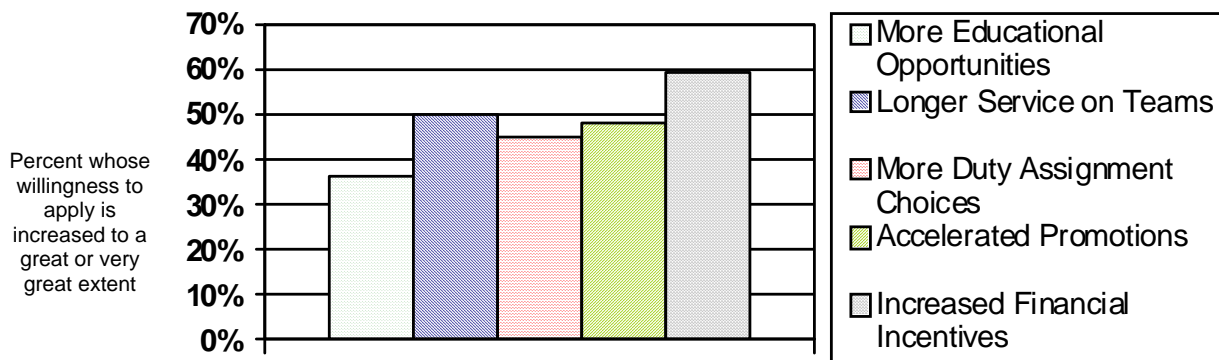


Figure 4. NCO Perceptions of Incentive Effectiveness.

Despite the pay remedy in 2004, Figure 4 shows that financial incentives continue to have the biggest overall impact on willingness to apply, with approximately 60% of NCOs indicating that such incentives would increase their willingness to apply to a great or very great extent.

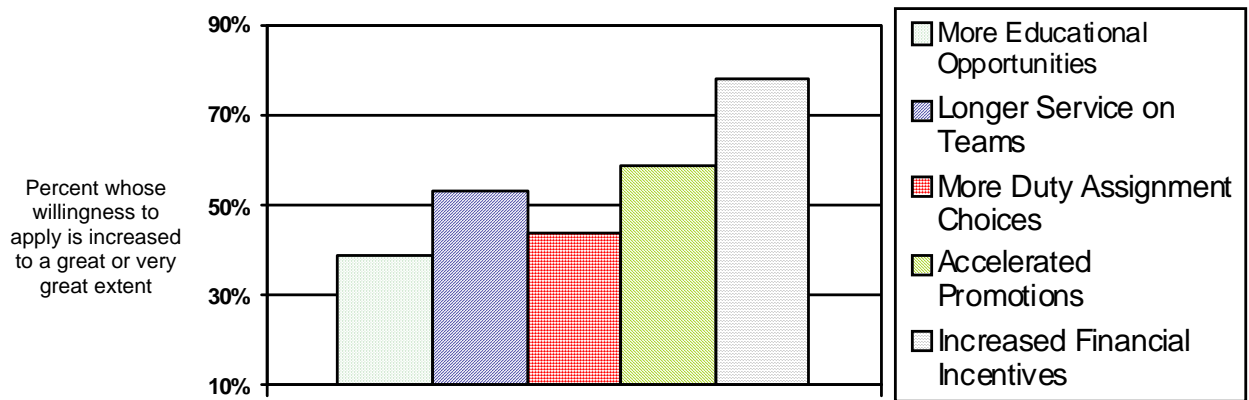


Figure 5. WO perceptions of Incentive Effectiveness.

Figure 5 indicates that WOs concur; nearly 80% of WOs feel that financial incentives would greatly increase SF Soldiers' willingness to apply for WO positions.

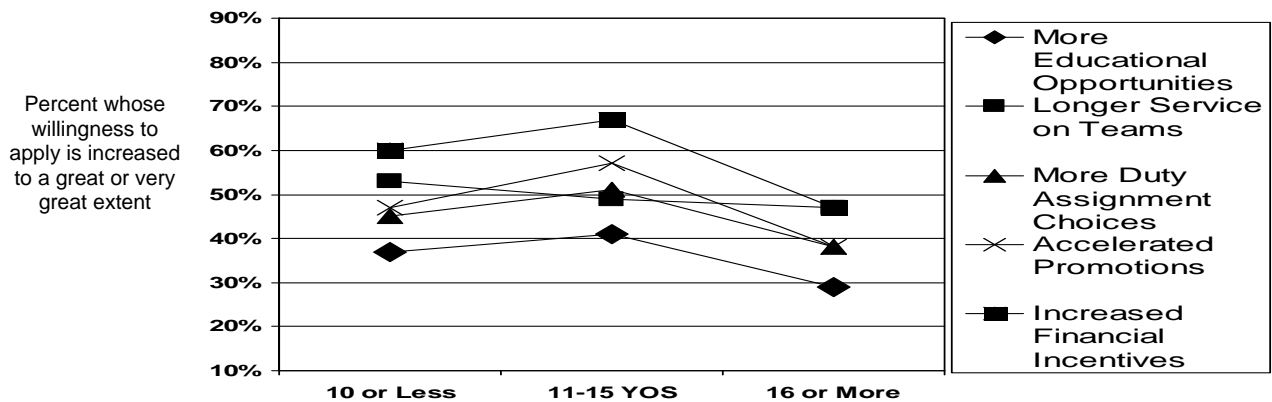


Figure 6. Incentive Effectiveness by Years of Service.

Figure 6 shows the percentage indicating that the incentive would increase their willingness to apply to a great or very great extent. The attractiveness of incentives varies by Years of Service (see Figure 6). Longer service on Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA) is the second most important incentive for NCOs with years of service (YOS) of 10 years or less. Accelerated promotions are second most important for NCOs with 11-15 YOS. And all incentives - even financial - have a diminishing impact on those with 16 or more YOS.

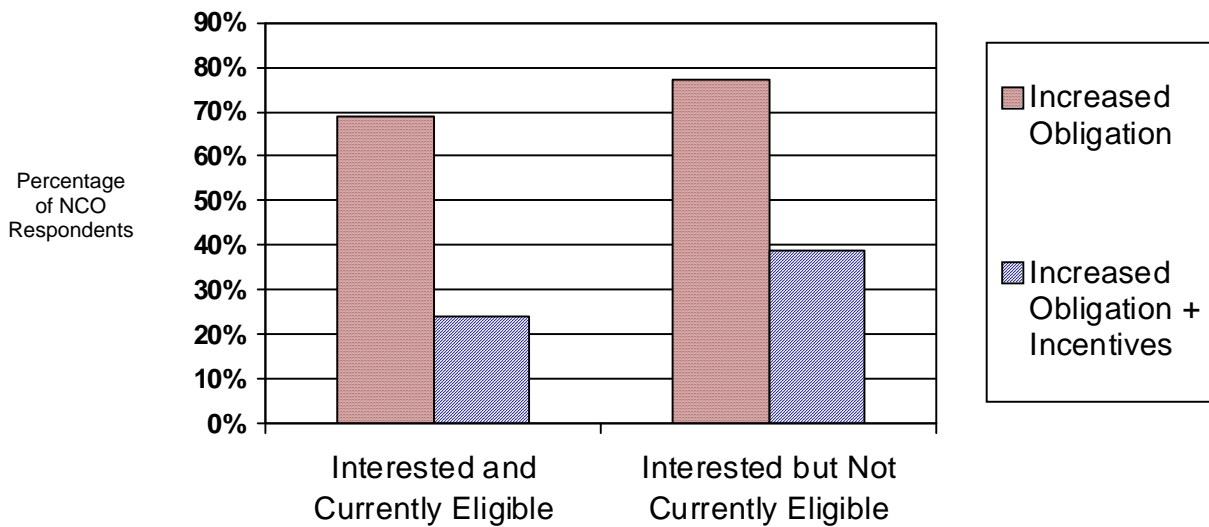


Figure 7. Percent of NCOs interested in applying who are less likely or much less likely to apply if the service obligation was increased to 10 years.

Figure 7 presents the impact of lengthening the WO service obligation among those NCOs who are interested in applying to be a WO. ‘Interested’ NCOs are defined as those who indicated that they are moderately, very, or extremely interested in applying to become a WO. ‘Eligible’ in Figure 7 is defined as E-6 or above, less than 14 years of active Federal service, and three or more years of service on an ODA. Figure 7 shows that nearly 70% of SF NCOs who are currently eligible and interested in applying for WO positions would be less or much less likely to apply under the longer obligation. For SF NCOs not yet eligible, nearly 80% would be less or much less likely to apply with a 10 year service obligation.

Figure 7 also shows that new incentives – including financial incentives – would only partially offset the adverse effect of a longer service obligation. Approximately 25% of those eligible and interested would still be less or much less likely to apply under the extended obligation, even with the additional incentives. For SF NCOs not yet eligible, this figure rises to nearly 40%.

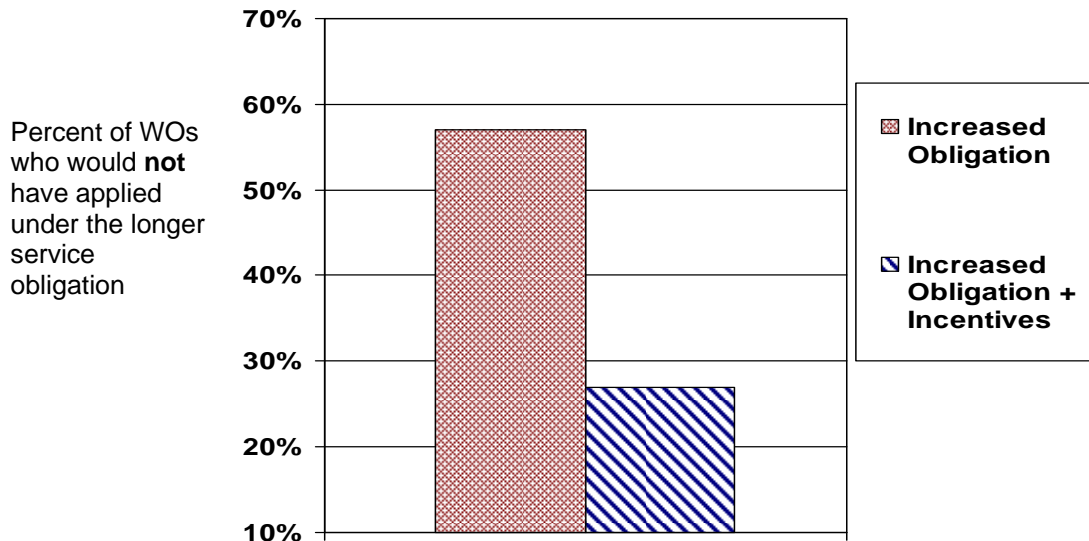


Figure 8. Percent of WOs who would not have applied if the service obligation was 10 years.

A similar pattern, to a lesser degree, occurs for WO respondents (see Figure 8). Nearly 60% would not have applied to be a WO if a 10 year obligation had been in place. And about 25% of WOs would not have applied even if compensatory incentives had been offered to offset the longer service obligation.

To assist in SF WO recruiting efforts, Figures 9 through 12 highlight the demographic characteristics of those NCOs most likely to be interested in applying for WO positions. Those eligible to apply show a higher level of interest. The data also suggest that SFCs and those with 11-15 YOS, excluding 18Es, are most likely to be interested in applying.

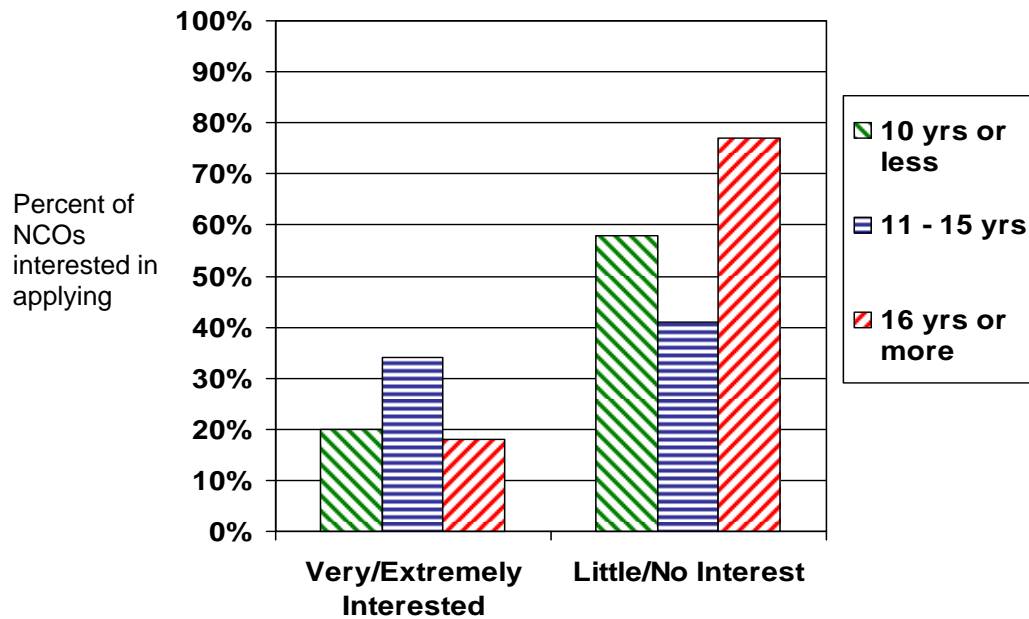


Figure 9. Interest of SF NCOs in WO Positions by Years of Service.

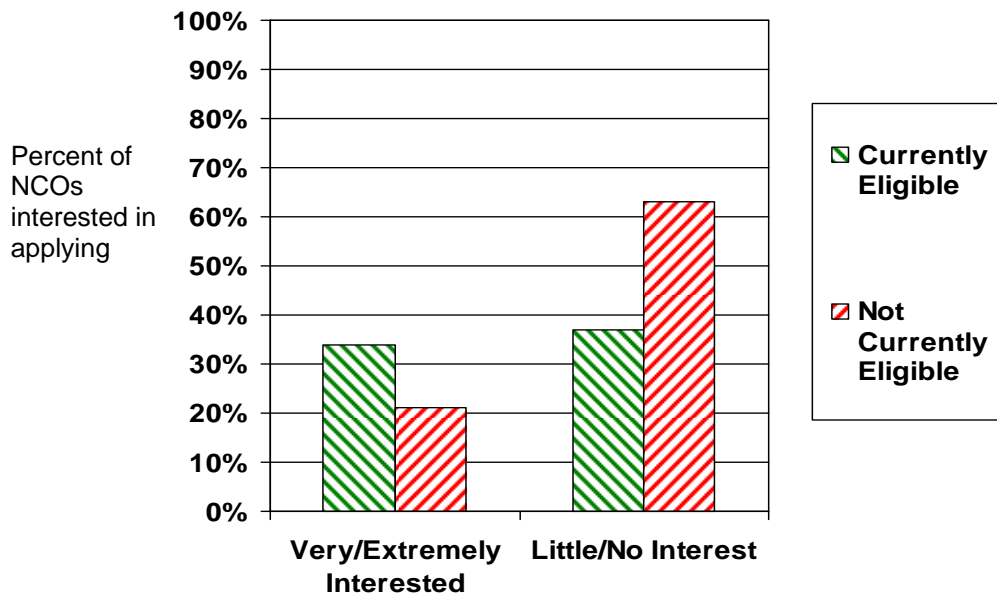


Figure 10. Interest of SF NCOs in WO Positions by Eligibility.

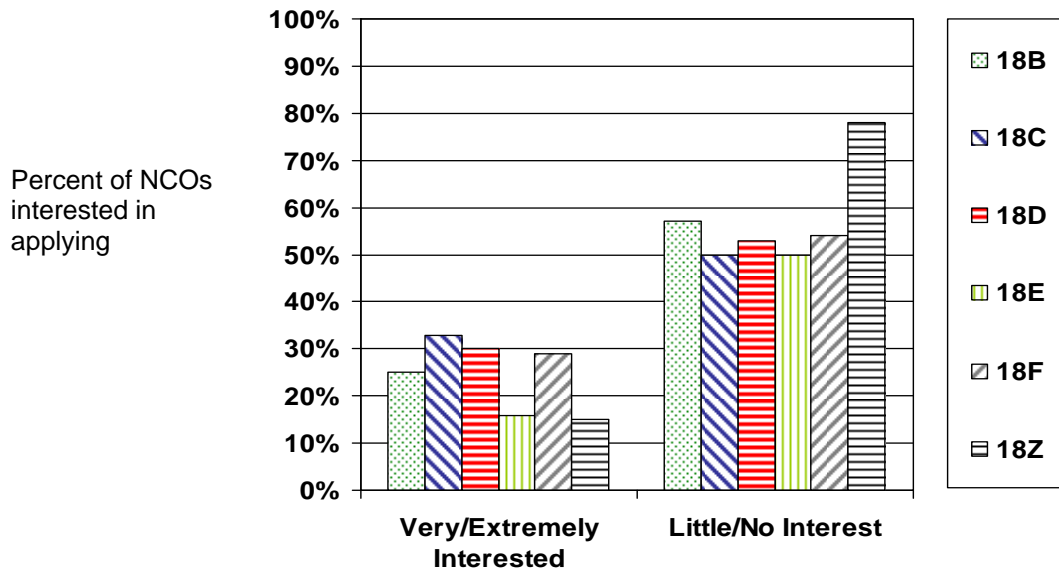


Figure 11. Interest of SF NCOs in WO Positions by MOS.

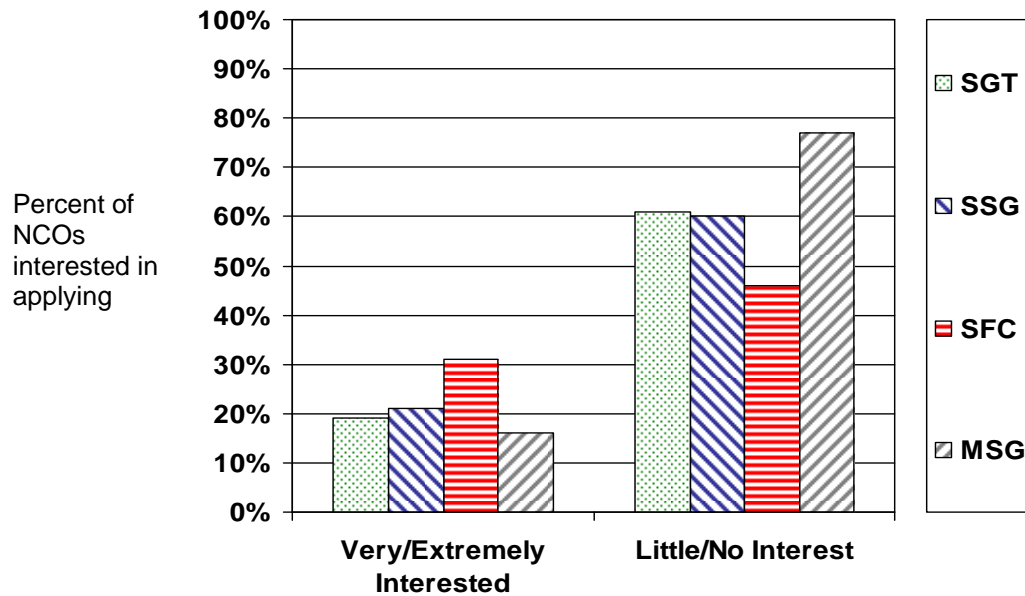


Figure 12. Interest of SF NCOs in WO Positions by Rank.

Conclusions

Increasing the WO obligation from six to 10 years will result in fewer WO applications. A rough estimate is that the number of applications will drop by 50% if the 10 year obligation is introduced without compensatory incentives. The right package of incentives along with an

extended obligation may result in roughly a 25% drop in applications. The incentive package should include financial incentives and options for longer service on ODAs to be maximally effective. The WO recruiting efforts can be maximized by focusing on SFCs and those with 11-15 YOS, excluding 18Es. Follow-up surveys and/or focus groups can be conducted to better specify the precise level of financial and other incentives necessary to achieve the desired impact.

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Ferro, G, Wisecarver, M. M., White, S. S., & McPherson, W. A. (2006). Recruitment and Accession of Special Forces Warrant Officers. (ARI Research Report 1851). Arlington, VA: U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences.